

THE MINUTES OF THE WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING SEPTEMBER 17, 2003

Handout(s) given out tonight:

1. *Minuteman Regional District Minuteman News for Municipal Officials dated July 23, 2003*
2. *Association of Town Finance Committees 2003 Annual Meeting Registration*
3. *FY03 Budgeted Revenues and Expenditures vs. Actual*
4. *Cost Cutting Initiatives Update Sept. 2003*

Members absent: P. Callanan

Also present: Town Administrator Kleckner, Town Accountant Barbara Hagg, Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney, and School Director of Finance and Administration Dr. Gerry Missal

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:41 PM.

Chairman Widmer announced Pat Morley has resigned from the Warrant Committee. A replacement has not yet been appointed.

He also mentioned an Association of Town Finance Committees meeting is open for Warrant Committee members (*Handout 2*). Town Accountant Hagg said her department would cover the cost for any members interested in attending.

The tentative Warrant Committee dates for the fall are: October 1, either October 15 *or* 22, October 29, November 5, and November 12. These meetings lead up to Town Meeting on Monday, November 17.

Monday, September 29 is the “Mega” Capital Meeting, and Monday, October 27 is the discussion of the FY05 Budget.

Reserve Fund Transfer

The Minuteman Assessment bill has come due. Town Accountant Hagg mentioned an email from another community expressing their dissatisfaction on the increased assessment.

- *Member Heigham made a motion, Member Hobbs seconded said motion and the Committee unanimously voted to transfer \$114,000 from the Warrant Committee Reserve Fund to the Minuteman Assessment account.*

Acceptance of Minutes

The Committee discussed and the minutes of the June 25, 2003 meeting.

- *Member Hofmann made a motion, Member Heigham seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes of June 25, 2003.*

Revised Budget Process

Chairman Widmer said he was part of a subcommittee that worked this summer on revising the budget process so the Warrant Committee will have a stronger role. The aim is to have the Warrant Committee more actively involved earlier in the process around some of the major issues confronting the Town. Also, he would like the Warrant Committee to help the Town focus on larger policy issues. One example of a broad issue for FY05 is whether the Town should have an override. Lastly, there was an effort to get more agreement within the Warrant Committee subcommittee responsibilities and their role for the Town Meeting Reports.

There is no suggestion the Warrant Committee will replace the Board of Selectmen and School Committee's roles. Our recommendation is that we as a Warrant Committee begin, in the timeframe of mid-October to mid-November, to have a meaningful discussion regarding the larger policy issues and major issues coming to Town Meeting. A second recommendation is that we have begun to put together some guidelines/roles for the subcommittees as well as guidelines about our report. This will be put on the agenda for the next meeting. We are recommending that we start the subcommittee process earlier with the departments before the budget process takes place. The notion would be that we would have met with the department heads before the Saturday morning meetings. Chairman Widmer added that he would also like some consistency in the Report. Part of all this change in the process is so it would be easier for newcomers to become accustomed to what is expected.

Selectman Brownsberger and Town Administrator Kleckner have also been reviewing the whole budget process since they are coming from different perspectives and roles. Selectman Brownsberger appreciates the Warrant Committee getting involved earlier. He would like to have a public discussion of the major issues of the budget on October 27. There will be a process of figuring out best guesses on things like health insurance increases.

Vice Chairman White talked of the five-year projection of the basic Town financials. What we are trying to do is get our best assumptions earlier on for this projection. Then Town Accountant Hagg can take these agreed upon assumptions as a starting point for estimates. We want to go in to the process knowing roughly where we think we are.

Town Administrator Kleckner discussed the format of the budget. Over the summer, one idea the Town is looking to do is introduce departmental goals/objectives within the budget process, and begin to identify performance areas within those goals and the budget. Each group within the budget will have a consistent document stating the goals and objectives of their department. The Town will begin to identify some future performance measures. The line items will be the same, but there will be a standardized summary for each department.

Chairman Widmer views these changes as a work in progress and he welcomes any suggestions. Selectman Brownsberger added he welcomes everyone's interest in this, and he is also open hearing suggestions.

Member McCormick asked if there has been any thought in looking back into last year's budget issues and see how the issues are doing this year. He cited Fire Department overtime as an example. We want to get it as complete as possible, not just a yearly with department heads. Member Oates also approves of more frequent, earlier meetings with departments.

Capital Planning

Selectman Brownsberger mentioned that we need to talk about how we are going to make the decisions that commit us to the capital project plans. There are a range of decisions that are included in what is presented to the voters. We are going to weigh some of those issues at the September 29 meeting such as:

- catching up on our backlog of capital spending,
- spread the cost of the catch-up over the next 30 years,
- we ought to be able to pay at a more constant rate, preserve voter control – voters want to know what they are voting for,
- any tax increase set ought to sunset, and
- we would like to not have anything have to go through the Legislature.

Some options are:

- traditional borrowings,
- a mix of accelerated and traditional borrowings – which preserves voter control and keeps a somewhat constant rate,
- a stabilization fund designed to smooth things out dedicated to upcoming projects,
- a “great, big stabilization fund” where all the money is at place, or
- add a provision to the above construct that says if you want to spend out of the stabilization fund, you must get voter approval.

The Committee discussed the issues Selectman Brownsberger mentioned. Member Kobus asked if any other town has used this new stabilization fund idea legislation. Town Administrator Kleckner said he is sure cities and towns set aside money for this purpose. Member Hobbs mentioned the Town runs the risk of some projects not getting done as quickly because they are not voted as a priority, while other projects that may not be deemed a priority may be ready to go before the larger more popular projects.

Member Schafer is the Warrant Committee representative on the Senior Center Building Committee. They will be meeting through the fall to get an RFP for designs done. The RFP will request a design for a second floor with nothing in it. Member Oates added the Fire Department Building Committee's RFP's will be posted in the Central Register next week, with a mid-October deadline.

Update on Cost Cutting Initiatives (Handout 4)

Member Brusch reviewed the handout with the Committee.

Regionalization of 911

Member McCormick and Vice Chairman White volunteered for this topic.

Fire Department Staffing

The topic will be explored this fall.

Review of Non-profit Properties

Member Hobbs said the subcommittee has received a spreadsheet from Assessing Administrator Reardon highlighting the large non-profit properties.

Asset Assessment

Member Curtis volunteered to be added to this Subcommittee.

Review of All Fees

The Committee has completed its work on this topic. It will be reviewed with department heads to see if they have anything to add before it is presented to the Warrant Committee.

Energy Savings

Member Brusch said there is a Committee working on this issue with Selectman Solomon.

Other

Town Administrator Kleckner said we are very interested in early retirement incentive. The legislation allows us to look at this more strategically than in the past. As we start getting into this, we find more and more obstacles with the legislation. It is still a work in progress. The Board of Selectmen have to make a decision by November 1, and we are likely to get a Town Meeting vote to do what we have to do. We are starting to do the analysis, which will be presented to the Board of Selectmen in order for them to make a November 1 deadline.

Report of the Nominating Committee

Member Hobbs said the current officers would continue their positions for the upcoming year.

- *The Committee unanimously voted in favor of keeping the officers in tact.*

Member Hofmann made a motion, and it voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Recording Clerk